A/52/21/Rev.1

United Nations

Report of the Committee on Information

General Assembly

Official Records
Fifty-second session
Supplement No. 21 (A/52/21/Rev.1)

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United Nations • New York, 1998

Note

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ISSN 0255-190X

[Original: English]
[9 January 1998]

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Chapter I
Introduction

1. At its thirty-fourth session, the General Assembly decided to maintain the Committee to Review United Nations Public Information Policies and Activities, established under Assembly resolution 33/115 C of 18 December 1978, which would thenceforth be known as the Committee on Information, and to increase its membership from 41 to 66. In its resolution 34/182 of 18 December 1979, the Assembly requested the Committee on Information:

> "(a) To continue to examine United Nations public information policies and activities, in the light of the evolution of international relations, particularly during the past two decades, and of the imperatives of the establishment of the new international economic order and of a new world information and communication order;
>
> "(b) To evaluate and follow up the efforts made and the progress achieved by the United Nations system in the field of information and communications;
>
> "(c) To promote the establishment of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order intended to strengthen peace and international understanding and based on the free circulation and wider and better balanced dissemination of information and to make recommendations thereon to the General Assembly;"

and requested the Committee and the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly at its thirty-fifth session.

2. At its thirty-fifth session, the General Assembly, in resolution 35/201 of 16 December 1980, expressed its satisfaction with the work of the Committee, approved its report and the recommendations of its Ad Hoc Working Group,[1] reaffirmed the mandate given to the Committee in its resolution 34/182, and decided to increase the membership of the Committee from 66 to 67. At its organizational session in 1980, the Committee agreed that the principle of geographical rotation would be applied to all the officers of the Committee and that they should be elected for two-year terms of office.

3. At its thirty-sixth to fiftieth sessions (resolutions 36/149 B, 37/94 B, 38/82 B, 39/98 A, 40/164 A, 41/68 A, 42/162 A, 43/60 A, 44/50, 45/76 B, 46/73 B, 47/73 B, 48/44 B, 49/38 B and 50/31 B), the General Assembly again expressed its satisfaction with the work of the Committee and approved its reports[2] and recommendations. At its fifty-first session, in resolutions 51/138 A and B of 13 December 1996, the Assembly took note of the report of the Committee[3] and adopted its consensus recommendations. The Assembly also requested the Committee to report to it at its fifty-second session.

4. At its thirty-ninth session, the General Assembly appointed two new members of the Committee, namely China and Mexico; at its forty-first session, the Assembly appointed Malta a member of the Committee; at its forty-third session, it appointed Hungary, Ireland and Zimbabwe; and at its forty-fourth session, it appointed Nepal.

5. At its forty-fifth session, the General Assembly decided to increase the membership of the Committee from 74 to 78 members, and appointed Czechoslovakia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jamaica and Uruguay members of the Committee. The Assembly also decided to appoint the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic as a member of the Committee, with immediate effect, to fill the vacancy left by the German Democratic Republic.

6. At its forty-sixth session, the General Assembly decided to increase the membership of the Committee from 78 to 79 members, and appointed Burkina Faso a member of the Committee.

7. At its forty-seventh session, the General Assembly decided to increase the membership of the Committee from 79 to 81 members, and appointed the Republic of Korea and Senegal members of the Committee.

8. At its forty-eighth session, the General Assembly decided to increase the membership of the Committee from 81 to 83 members, and appointed Gabon and Israel members of the Committee.

9. At its forty-ninth session, the General Assembly decided to increase the membership of the Committee from 83 to 88 members, and appointed Belize, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Kazakhstan and South Africa members of the Committee.

10. At its fiftieth session, the General Assembly decided to increase the membership of the Committee from 88 to 89 members, and appointed the Democratic People's Republic of Korea a member of the Committee.

11. The Committee is composed of the following Member States:

Algeria
Argentina
Bangladesh
Belarus
Belgium
Belize
Benin
Brazil
Bulgaria
Burkina Faso
Burundi
Chile
China
Colombia
Congo
Costa Rica
Côte d'Ivoire
Croatia
Cuba
Cyprus
Czech Republic
Democratic People's Republic of Korea
Democratic Republic of the Congo
Denmark
Ecuador
Egypt
El Salvador
Ethiopia
Finland
France
Gabon
Germany
Ghana
Greece
Guatemala
Guinea
Guyana
Hungary
India
Indonesia
Iran (Islamic Republic of)
Ireland
Israel
Italy
Jamaica
Japan
Jordan
Kazakhstan
Kenya
Lebanon
Malta
Mexico
Mongolia
Morocco
Nepal
Netherlands
Niger
Nigeria
Pakistan
Peru
Philippines
Poland
Portugal
Republic of Korea
Romania
Russian Federation
Senegal
Singapore
Slovakia
Somalia
South Africa
Spain
Sri Lanka
Sudan
Syrian Arab Republic
Togo
Trinidad and Tobago
Tunisia
Turkey
Ukraine
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
United Republic of Tanzania
United States of America
Uruguay
Venezuela
Viet Nam
Yemen
Yugoslavia
Zimbabwe

Chapter II
Organizational questions

A. Opening of the session

12. The organizational meeting of the nineteenth session of the Committee was held at United Nations Headquarters on 13 May 1997. The session was opened by the outgoing Chairman of the Committee, Mr. Ivan Maximov (Bulgaria).

13. At the same meeting, the Bureau of the Committee was elected, except for the third Vice-Chairman, who was elected by acclamation on 14 May (see para. 15). The new Chairman and the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information made statements (see annexes I and II). Mr. Mark Malloch Brown, Chairman of the Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities established by the Secretary-General, informally briefed the session on the objectives of the Task Force. He said that the members of the Task Force would closely monitor proceedings in the Committee during its session to gain guidance.

14. The Chairman informed the Committee that the Bureau, the representatives of the regional groups and the Group of 77 and China had received a proposal from a regional group during the process of regular consultations with the Department of Public Information to hold the nineteenth session in two segments. That proposal was made to enable the Committee to have an opportunity to consider the recommendations by the Secretary-General for the reorientation of United Nations public information activities expected in July, and, in that context, the report of the Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities, established by the Secretary-General. According to the proposal, the second segment would be held after the announcement of the Secretary-General's proposals. The Chairman stated that he took it that the Committee agreed with that approach. Some delegations expressed reservations regarding the approach and were of the view that the Committee should debate information issues so that its input could be given to the Secretary-General before the reform proposals were formulated. Other delegations argued in favour of the proposal. The Committee decided by consensus, after a debate in which 14 Member States spoke, to hold the session in two segments. Consequently, the first segment would be held from 13 to 19 May 1997 and the second segment in early September 1997. It was further decided that Member States would have the opportunity to make statements during the second segment.

B. Election of officers

15. In accordance with the principle of geographical rotation, the Committee elected the following officers to serve for the period 1997-1998:

Chairman:

Mr. José Alberto de Sousa (Portugal)

Vice-Chairmen:

Mr. Holger Martinsen (Argentina)
Ms. Maria Laose-Ajayi (Nigeria)
Mr. Salman Abbasy (Pakistan)

Rapporteur:

Mr. Alyaksei Skrypko (Belarus)

C. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work

16. At its organizational meeting, the Committee adopted, without objection, the following agenda and programme of work (A/AC.198/1997/1):

1. Opening of the session.
2. Election of officers.
3. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work.
4. Statement by the Chairman.
5. Statement by the Assistant Secretary-General.
6. General debate and consideration of substantive questions:
   (a) Promotion of the establishment of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order intended to strengthen peace and international understanding and based on the free circulation and wider and better balanced dissemination of information;
   (b) Continuation of the examination of United Nations public information policies and activities, in the light of the evolution of international relations, and of the need to establish the new international economic order and the new world information and communication order;
   (c) Evaluation and follow-up of the efforts made and the progress achieved by the United Nations system in the field of information and communications.
7. Preparation and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its fifty-second session.

17. The Committee held the substantive meetings of its nineteenth session at United Nations Headquarters from 13 to 19 May 1997. It resumed for meetings on 3 September and 14 and 17 November 1997.

18. For consideration of agenda item 6, the Committee had before it the reports of the Secretary-General on: (a) evaluation of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library (A/AC.198/1997/2 and Add.1); (b) review of publications by the Department of Public Information (A/AC.198/1997/3); (c) review of publications produced by the Department of Public Information in the sphere of development (A/AC.198/1997/4); (d) integration of United Nations information centres with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (A/AC.198/1997/5); (e) evaluation of the United Nations information centres (A/AC.198/1997/6); (f) activities of the Joint United Nations Information Committee in 1996 (A/AC.198/1997/7); and (g) observations and suggestions by Member States and international organizations on ways and means of furthering the development of communications infrastructures and capabilities in developing countries (A/AC.198/1997/8). Also before the Committee were three informal conference room papers: Department of Public Information – core functions; questionnaire to directors of United Nations information centres; and questionnaire to partners of United Nations information centres.

19. For its resumed session, held on 3 September 1997, the Committee had before it two conference room papers, one containing a note to the Committee in which the Secretary-General conveyed his proposals regarding measures in the context of reorientation of United Nations public information activities, and one containing the report of the Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities, entitled "Global vision, local voice: a strategic communications programme for the United Nations".

D. Observers

20. The following Member States took part in the session as observers: Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Canada, Eritrea, Lesotho, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Kyrgyzstan, Luxembourg, Suriname, Sweden, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkmenistan, United Arab Emirates and Uzbekistan; the Holy See also participated as an observer.

21. Representatives of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Health Organization and the Organization of African Unity also attended.

E. Other matters

22. The Chairman informed the Committee that the Republic of Georgia had requested membership in the Committee.

Chapter III
General debate and consideration of substantive questions

A. First part of the nineteenth session (13-19 May 1997)

23. Statements during the general debate were made by the following States members of the Committee: Algeria, Argentina, Bangladesh, Belarus, Brazil, Bulgaria, China, Cuba, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Ecuador, Egypt, Ghana, Guyana, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland (on behalf of the Group of Western European and Other States), Israel, Jamaica (on behalf of the States members of the Caribbean Community), Mexico, Morocco, the Netherlands (on behalf of the European Union), Nigeria, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Ukraine, United Republic of Tanzania (on behalf of the Group of 77), Uruguay, United States of America and Zimbabwe. Statements were also made by the observers of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the United Arab Emirates. A message from the Assistant Director-General for Communication, Information and Informatics of UNESCO was read out.

24. In taking up the substantive questions before the Committee, all speakers expressed the sincere dedication of their Governments to freedom of the press and freedom of information, which were fundamental freedoms indispensable to democracy and development. They condemned attacks on journalists wherever they occurred and paid solemn tribute to those who had been killed in the pursuit of their profession. Many delegations recalled the important commemoration of World Press Freedom Day on 2 May 1997, with one speaker characterizing the programme arranged by the Department of Public Information as "superb". Several others strongly supported the regional press seminars organized by the Department in cooperation with UNESCO and noted the positive role they played in the promotion of independent and pluralistic media. They appreciated the Department's support for a similar seminar being planned for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, to be held at Sofia in September 1997.

25. A number of speakers pointed to the continuing importance of a new world information and communication order, based on a free and balanced flow of information, in a world where disparities in technological advances were widespread and the gap between the developed and developing countries was ever-widening. In their view it was critical that the gains of the information revolution were made accessible to the developing countries. They said that the mass media must impartially serve the cause of democracy, development and peace. Several speakers said that the information should not undermine values, distort facts or demonstrate a bias towards countries with different systems and values.

26. In addressing the public information policies and activities of the United Nations, all speakers supported the view that communications programmes, promotion of United Nations objectives and dissemination of information to project a positive image of the United Nations in all its aspects were the priorities of the Department of Public Information. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a group, said that there must be a commitment to the urgent task of strengthening the role of information in the United Nations system. Enhancing United Nations capabilities to deal with the challenges of the twenty-first century in the field of information was a top priority, in the words of another speaker.

27. Many delegations voiced an understanding of the need for reform of the United Nations, which would include reform of the Department of Public Information. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a large group in supporting the Secretary-General's reform efforts, pointed to the importance of the Department's advocacy tasks aimed at winning people over to the side of the United Nations. In the words of another delegation, it was important that the good news about the United Nations be told. All agreed that resources commensurate with the message must be made available.

28. All delegations took note of the fact that the Task Force on the Reorientation of the United Nations Public Information Activities would be submitting recommendations in July 1997. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a large group, as well as a number of other speakers, were emphatically of the opinion that the views of the Member States should be sought on any proposed reform of the Department of Public Information. They believed, therefore, that there should be close cooperation and involvement of the membership of the Committee on Information with the Task Force for the sake of transparency in the reform process. As one speaker put it, the acquiescence and support of Member States was a sine qua non for the success of the ongoing reform of the United Nations. A number of speakers questioned whether the composition of the Task Force would allow it to consider adequately the diverse interests of all Member States and produce objective recommendations. One delegation suggested that media experts from developing countries be added to the Task Force.

29. One speaker said that reform should not be an end in itself or reflect the views of only one country or group of countries and that the Committee should approve any new proposals on the structure of the Department of Public Information before they were implemented. Another recalled that the reform of the Department undertaken some 10 years earlier had been a failure, and hoped such an outcome would not be repeated. Several delegations said that it was important for the Task Force to work in close contact with senior officials of the Department in formulating its recommendations. In one delegation's view, the head of the Department should be consulted on any reform of the Department, and there should be no shrinkage or elimination of programmes in a Department that enjoyed a vast consensus within the Organization.

30. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a large group, said that before the name of the Department of Public Information was changed, Member States should be involved and informed of the reasoning behind the proposal and how it would affect existing programmes and activities. Another speaker held the strong view that a name change or any other measures regarding the Department should be approved by the General Assembly. Several other delegations agreed that the Department's role should not be restricted merely to liaison between the Organization and the media. One speaker was of the view that the Department must use its mandate to play a primary, rather than subsidiary, role in generating support for development worldwide. In that connection, one delegation observed that the public information programme was as substantive as economic, humanitarian or any other programme, and that the Department was definitely not an administrative or support service. Several other speakers supported that point of view.

31. A number of speakers agreed that any change in the Department's structure must take into account General Assembly mandates; to do otherwise would, in the words of one speaker, "fly in the face" of the Assembly's instructions. Another speaker noted that many of the Department's functions had been mandated by the Assembly and that any changes that might affect those mandates required the input of the largest number of Member States. He expressed full confidence that the Secretary-General would ensure that the Task Force consulted with Member States. One speaker called for more transparency in the area of unfunded mandates, which were an enormous expense for the Department. Another delegation said that it would not welcome cuts in the use of the Russian language in the context of reform, while several others also stressed the importance of multilingualism and the dissemination of information in Arabic. Several delegations underscored that the objective of reform should not be limited merely to cost-cutting, but to enhanced efficiency and to producing more with less.

32. In that connection, many delegations praised the Department of Public Information for successfully managing to meet the increasing demands for information and for the effective and professional service it was providing in the current financial crisis. They reiterated their support for the dynamic and pragmatically oriented management of the Department and for its innovative approach to its information tasks and expressed appreciation to the entire staff for their dedicated work. In the words of one speaker, management and staff of the Department were deserving of great praise for their untiring efforts in strengthening the image of the United Nations and for high professional standards that they had at all times maintained in the execution of their duties. He suggested a careful examination of the structures and new methods of work devised by the Department in the last few years before new recommendations for its reform were developed or introduced. Another said that the Department had already begun its renovation, thereby creating a reliable basis for future reform.

33. A number of speakers underscored the importance of the Department's dissemination of information to developing countries. They also believed that in the present information age the Department must be strengthened; the reform process should, therefore, enhance rather than weaken the Department's functions. Another delegation, speaking on behalf of a large group, said that the Department should advise other departments and missions on how to integrate an information policy for outreach into their substantive work. One delegation, also speaking on behalf of a large group, advanced some specific suggestions to the Task Force, among which was that the free flow of accurate and up-to-date information, taking into account the linguistic diversity of the Organization, must remain the primary function of the Department and that the dissemination of relevant information about the United Nations and its programmes should continue to be a core activity of the Department, particularly in developing countries. He also hoped the Task Force would take "good note" of all the suggestions expressed at the current session of the Committee and was heartened by its commitment to continue the process of consultation with Member States so that the views of every delegation could be heard. He also said that reforms should be aimed primarily at creating a more effective, productive and resourceful Department of Public Information, rather than simply downsizing it or chopping off useful activities or programmes for the sake of effecting

economies. One speaker said that Member States should not expect the Department to persuade them of the usefulness of the Organization – that was a job for permanent representatives. He expected the Task Force to produce proposals further strengthening the Department's capacity to serve the needs of countries and peoples. In that context he was reassured by the participation of the Permanent Representative of Chile to the United Nations in the Task Force.

34. A number of delegations underscored the importance of continuing coordination by the Department of certain mandated activities pertaining to the mission and function of the United Nations in regard to peace and security and economic and social development, including, for example, special programmes on Palestine, decolonization, preservation of the environment and other development activities. One delegation expressed appreciation for the Department's excellent programme to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster. Another delegation said that the Department deserved recognition for its important role in the successful battle against apartheid in South Africa. One speaker congratulated the Department on its cooperation with Columbia University on the recent Roundtable on Communication for the Promotion of Peace, Development, Democracy and Respect for Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in the Global Village.

35. Many delegations, including one whose representative spoke on behalf of a number of others, stressed the critical importance of the information component in United Nations peacekeeping missions and strongly supported the involvement of the Department at the earliest planning stages of those missions. One speaker believed that peacekeeping was a key area for effective dissemination of information and supported the Secretary-General's call in that connection for "preventive journalism". Several delegations welcomed the interdepartmental consultative mechanism that met regularly to discuss the information components of peacekeeping operations. One speaker on behalf of a group specifically expressed appreciation for the seminar on public information policies and practices for field missions, organized in March 1997 by the Department of Public Information and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

36. Many speakers expressed support for the preservation and strengthening of the United Nations information centres and regretted any resource reductions to the detriment of their important programmes. One speaker on behalf of a group said that the United Nations must have "a voice and a face" in countries and regions around the world and to that end believed that the United Nations information centres were a key part of United Nations outreach. Another delegation characterized information centres as catalysts and pillars in the information strategy to stimulate public interest in the United Nations and sensitize the world's peoples to international issues. He felt that the directors of United Nations information centres were doing a good job in the face of shrinking resources. Another said that the functions of the United Nations information centres were far broader than their serving as mere depositories for documents. A number of speakers underscored the special value of centres as sources of information for developing countries in particular. In stressing that point, the representative of one delegation said that in those countries the United Nations information centres were the only point of contact with valuable materials from the United Nations. He also said that in developing countries particular emphasis should be placed on integrating technological innovations into the working of United Nations information centres to make them models of high-technology information for resource-starved people.

37. Another speaker said that his delegation attached great significance to the activities of the United Nations information centres and information components in countries with economies in transition. He underlined the increased effectiveness and valuable activities of the information component of the United Nations office in Minsk, which had resulted in the "soaring of public interest" in the United Nations. One delegation expressed appreciation for the work of the United Nations Information Centre in Moscow, but regretted its staffing situation, specifically the level of the Director's post, which should be raised. Speakers expressed satisfaction with the efficient work of United Nations information centres in Jakarta, Mexico City and Khartoum. In referring to the latter centre, one speaker noted that United Nations information centres should report on positive developments in the areas they served.

38. On the subject of integration of United Nations information centres with UNDP field offices, many delegations said that any integration should be considered on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration the views of the host countries. One delegation, calling United Nations information centres the Organization's "windows to the world", highlighted a number of problems, both administrative and substantive in nature, posed by integration. He therefore believed that there should be careful consideration of the process by Member States, who were the end users, and not by non-governmental actors, and added that the Department could not be reformed by outsiders. One speaker raised the issue of the loss of efficiency and effectiveness of the United Nations information centres in some countries, including his own,

following their integration with field offices of UNDP, and called for the restoration of the independent status of the United Nations Information Centre in Dhaka. Another delegation said that, concerning the operational structures of the Department of Public Information, particularly United Nations information centres and the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, his delegation had serious reservations about suggestions regarding the privatization of those structures or delegation of their management to bodies other than the United Nations because that would compromise their independence, credibility and objectivity.

39. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a group, said that integration was a useful mechanism in certain instances, but pointed out that where United Nations information centres could best carry forward their mandate separately, they should be able to maintain their distinct status. He further commended the United Nations Information Centre in Port-of-Spain for playing an important role in a region comprising widely dispersed countries and reiterated an earlier recommendation that the UNDP office in Jamaica be provided with the capacity to complement the activities of the information centre. He also supported the idea that United Nations information centres should be enabled to serve as public information service providers to United Nations bodies in their respective locations and that the centre spokesperson should be brought into the substantive preparation and handling of issues. One speaker said that integrated information centres should continue to be strengthened and that their directors should be given more access to in-depth background materials on a range of issues. One delegation commended closer cooperation between the Department of Public Information and UNDP through the high-level mechanism already in place and stressed the importance of the full implementation of the public information mandate, as well as the need for the Department to be consulted in the selection and in the performance evaluation of resident representatives/resident coordinators serving also as centre directors.

40. One delegation suggested that a fresh look at United Nations information centres was needed. To that end, he said that perhaps the Task Force should study five or six specific centres to see what worked and what did not. Another delegation, speaking on behalf of a large group, suggested that the Task Force consider that the role of United Nations information centres should be more focused on the issues relevant to individual countries, that they should have sufficient resources to carry out their main tasks and that they should be integrated where appropriate and beneficial.

41. On the subject of utilizing new technologies for spreading the message of the United Nations, many speakers expressed their appreciation for the Department's efforts to disseminate materials electronically in order to expand United Nations outreach and save money. One speaker observed that there was a new momentum within the Department to raise information activities to the most modern level. Another commended the Department's use of modern communication technologies, singling out its good work in enriching the United Nations home page on the Internet, as well as the use of modern technologies by the Dag Hammarskjöld Library. One speaker noted with great satisfaction that the United Nations home page on the Internet was now available in French and Spanish, in addition to English. At the same time, many speakers stressed the importance of continued dissemination of information in the traditional media to meet the needs of those countries that were less technologically advanced than others. In that connection, one delegation supported the view expressed by the Administrative Committee on Coordination on universal access to basic communication and information services that the United Nations should assist in making the gains of the information revolution accessible to developing countries.

42. A number of delegations commented on the value of publications produced by the Department of Public Information in transmitting the message of the United Nations. Several expressed their strong support for the Department's development publications, including *Development Business, Development Update, UN Chronicle, Africa Recovery* and *UN Briefing Papers*, which they believed could help foster development concerns. One delegation in particular appreciated that *Development Business* had the capacity to generate commercial opportunities, while another delegation supported making that publication available on the Internet. One speaker suggested the possibility of the Department's creating a new daily or weekly publication that would include the most important information about the work of the United Nations system. One delegation pointed to the Department's successes, such as the Blue Books series and the *UN Chronicle*, which had been improved.

43. On the subject of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, one delegation was particularly impressed by the reform already under way in the Library and considered the survey by the consultants to be very good. Another speaker welcomed the recommendations contained in the survey and was pleased that they had been endorsed by the Secretary-General. He therefore hoped that the Task Force would make use of the evaluation to enhance further the Library's functions. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a large group, observed that the evaluation contained many useful proposals and that

it should be implemented at an early date. Several delegations appreciated the Library's training programmes, which had greatly benefited them, and thanked the staff for the continuing reference services they provided. One delegation expressed the hope that the Library would be allocated resources commensurate with its work.

44. A number of delegations were highly appreciative of the services that the Department of Public Information provided to correspondents. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a group, said that the daily highlights and press releases were particularly valuable to small delegations and should be maintained. Several mentioned the importance of outreach to small and medium-sized media organizations, especially in the developing world. In that connection one delegation praised the Department for establishing links with diverse media around the world. One delegation pointed to the Department's programmes for training media professionals in developing countries, including Palestinian journalists, and hoped that the Department would continue to play a pioneering role in that area. Another expressed appreciation to the Department for organizing the World Television Forum, held from 19 to 21 November 1997.

45. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a group, suggested that the Task Force consider the question of improved access of the press to reliable sources of information within the Secretariat. He also said that the Office of the Spokesman of the Secretary-General should offer a forceful expression of the Secretary-General's position and should anticipate and package stories in a format suitable for media consumption. He said further that it would remain the task of the Department of Public Information as a whole to supply other forms of straightforward factual material to the news media. Another delegation, speaking on behalf of a group, commended the Department for its efforts to reflect linguistic diversity in the information it produced and in that context appreciated its press releases in both working languages and encouraged their dissemination over the Internet.

46. Several delegations also expressed satisfaction at the multilingualism in the Department's radio output, and pointed in particular to the Spanish and Portuguese programming. One speaker said that his delegation had been working actively with the Department on the development of the Portuguese programme for United Nations Radio, which was a success and should be further enhanced. Another delegation, speaking on behalf of a large group, stressed that radio remained the most important and versatile information medium in the Caribbean and called for the strengthening of the Department's Caribbean Radio Unit. Several speakers emphasized the central role that radio played in developing countries as the most accessible medium to their peoples, and in that connection pointed to the need to strengthen the Department's radio services. Another delegation noted innovations introduced by the Department, such as the worldwide live radio discussion on global issues held between the Secretary-General and journalists from radio networks on five continents. In the view of one delegation, the Department should be provided with the necessary financial resources for its radio production.

47. One delegation protested the violation of its national sovereignty by the radio and television transmissions that another country was directing specifically against it for subversive goals. His country would continue to adopt the necessary measures to protect its sovereignty and dignity, he said.

48. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a group, praised the Department's guided tour operation and expressed the hope that tours would be allowed access to as much of the Headquarters building as possible. In his view, that should include access to the General Assembly and Security Council chambers, even when formal meetings were in session.

49. Several delegations pointed to the positive contributions of the Joint United Nations Information Committee in developing a joint message of the United Nations. Another suggested that the role of that Committee might be strengthened in the process of reform so that it could serve as a forum for the coordination of an information strategy within the United Nations system.

50. Following the debate, the Committee continued deliberation on its upcoming programme of work.

51. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a large group, reported that her group had met to discuss various aspects of the work of the Committee. She said that while it was not her intention to question the credibility of the group composed of the Bureau of the Committee, representatives of the regional groups and the Group of 77 and China, her group believed that decisions on substantive issues should be taken in the Committee rather than in the "extended" Bureau. Therefore, an informal working group could be convened to make conclusive and mutually satisfactory recommendations on the reform of the Department, as well as on the draft resolutions to be adopted by the Committee. She further said that the composition of the Bureau should be limited to the elected Bureau, although in her group's view the Chairman could invite other Committee members to participate on an equitable geographic basis. A number of other delegations supported that general position.

52. One speaker specified that in the view of his delegation, it was the working methods of the Committee on Information, rather than the reform work of the Task Force, that was under consideration. He emphasized, and another delegation agreed, that the two issues should not be linked. Several delegations did not believe that the work of the group composed of the Bureau of the Committee, representatives of regional groups and the Group of 77 and China had been successful. One speaker stressed the importance of the Committee's activities and stated that further deliberations should be held before the session resumed in September.

53. Another delegation, speaking on behalf of a large group, said that in its view the work of the Bureau of the Committee, the representatives of regional groups and the Group of 77 and China had been conducted in an open and transparent manner, with the representation of all regional groups. He said that the function of that group was, first and foremost, to meet for consultations and for information purposes, and that no decisions of a substantive nature were taken at its meetings. In his view, the extended Bureau had operated well for a number of years and had done a good job. He stressed the importance of maintaining the consensus that had prevailed in the Committee. The same speaker said that he realized that the process of reform had given rise to fears and suspicion. However, in the view of the delegations he represented, the members of the Committee had had an opportunity to present their views in the general debate, and now the Task Force must be allowed to do its work. He said that the members of the Task Force had made clear that they were open to suggestions and there had been no shortage of consultations. In the view of his delegation, the appropriate time to consider the work of the Task Force was during the resumed nineteenth session of the Committee, scheduled for September, when any recommendations could be seen in the context of the overall reform process; he therefore asked that all decisions on substantive issues be deferred until that time.

54. A number of delegations spoke in support of that point of view. One speaker stated that in the view of his delegation, the resolutions adopted by the Committee at previous sessions had always reflected the wishes and recommendations of all members, and, accordingly, he wondered where, if at all, the Bureau had gone wrong in its work. He thought that creating other mechanisms for the workings of the Committee would create a bureaucratic nightmare.

55. Representatives of several groups said that they required additional details on the proposal that had been put forward, as well as more time for consultations before a decision could be taken on it.

56. In view of the discussion that had taken place, the Chairman of the Committee decided to continue bilateral consultations with the representatives of the regional groups and with the Bureau. The purpose would be to arrive at a consensus recommendation regarding the proposals, as well as an agreed date to convene a resumed meeting prior to September.

B. Resumed session (3 September and 14 and 17 November 1997)

57. In accordance with the agreement reached at the first part of the session, the Committee on Information opened its resumed nineteenth session on 3 September. The Committee had before it a conference room paper containing a note to the Committee in which the Secretary-General had conveyed his proposals regarding measures in the context of the reorientation of United Nations activities, as well as a conference room paper containing the report of the Task Force.

58. The Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information gave an overview of the contents of the note to the Committee and indicated that the Secretary-General was in concurrence with the conceptual approach and thrust of the main recommendations of the Task Force. He added that in the view of the Secretary-General, public information and communications were an integral part of the substantive programme of the United Nations, and not merely a support function.

59. The Chairman of the Task Force addressed the resumed session on behalf of his colleagues on the Task Force and highlighted the principal recommendations contained in its report. He stressed the need for Member States to ensure that the mandates in the field of communications and public information should be commensurate with the resources available to the department concerned. He added that the intent of the Task Force was not to instruct the Department on how to do its work; rather, it was to give it authority, direction and purpose.

60. The Chairman of the Committee subsequently informed the Committee that on the basis of his consultations with the regional and other groups, he had been led to believe that Member States felt that they needed more time to study the documentation before the Committee and therefore wished to suspend the session to allow time for consultations. He assured the Committee that he would

come back to it with the results of his consultations prior to the consideration of agenda item 89 by the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee). The Committee decided on that basis to suspend the session.

61. In the intervening period, the Chairman invited representatives of regional groups and others for consultations regarding the conclusion of item 6 and the consideration of item 7 of the Committee's agenda, during which he stressed the importance of reaching early decisions on the issues before it since the Committee on Information was to resume its session before item 89, entitled "Questions relating to information", was considered by the Special Political and Decolonization Committee. During those consultations, there was an overall consensus that because of the unusual circumstances surrounding the work of the Committee in 1997, the drafting of a technical resolution to be included in the report of the Committee to the Special Political and Decolonization Committee was indicated.

62. In another round of consultations, the Chairman prepared a draft that he shared with the representatives of regional groups and others. Following further consultations, held on 13 November 1997, the Chairman was asked to put together, for consideration by the Committee, a draft resolution prepared on the basis of texts submitted by the African, Asian and Latin American and Caribbean groups, as well as the draft he had already circulated. The new draft resolution proposed by the Chairman was presented to the Committee in document A/AC.198/1997/L.3.

Chapter IV
Preparation and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its fifty-second session

63. At its 6th meeting, on 19 May 1997, the Committee decided, by consensus, to recommend to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft decision:

Draft decision

Increase in the membership of the Committee on Information

The General Assembly decides to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 89 to 90 members and to appoint Georgia as a member of the Committee on Information.

64. At its 8th meeting, on 14 November 1997, the Committee proceeded to take up item 7, Preparation and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its fifty-second session. Statements were made by the representatives of Algeria, Belarus, Brazil, China, Cuba, Egypt, Jamaica, the Netherlands, Pakistan and the Syrian Arab Republic.

65. The first version of the draft report of the Committee on its nineteenth session (A/AC.198/1997/L.1) was introduced by the Rapporteur and was considered on a section-by-section basis. On the basis of proposals of several delegations, the Committee agreed to amend paragraphs 14 and 60 to reflect appropriately the process of consultations by the Chairman since its meeting held in September. As a result two new paragraphs were added following paragraph 60 of the draft report.

66. The Committee decided by consensus to adopt draft resolution A, entitled "Information in the service of humanity", as contained in document A/AC.198/1997/L.2, and draft resolution B, entitled "United Nations public information policies and activities", contained in document A/AC.198/1997/L.3. One delegation expressed the view that the resolution had been hastily put together and that little opportunity had been afforded for extensive discussion and review at the level of the Committee as a whole.

67. A number of delegations made statements concerning the overall functioning and method of work of the Committee on Information. Underscoring the dynamic quality of information, some delegations expressed the view that the mechanism of consultations between the Chairman and the representatives of the regional groups and others, while useful, was insufficient. Those delegations proposed that the Committee adopt the mechanism of informal consultations at forthcoming sessions of the Committee. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a group, said that it could not support this approach. It believed that the existing mechanism had worked effectively to preserve a spirit of compromise and partnership.

68. All delegations agreed that the work of the Committee in 1997 had been conducted under exceptional circumstances. Several speakers pointed to the fact that the Committee had not been able to finish its business. One pointed to a lack of "seriousness" in the conduct of its work at the current session. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a group, said that this was due to external circumstances outside the control of the Committee.

69. Given the fact that the session had been held during a period of United Nations reform, several delegations voiced their disappointment that an opportunity had been

lost for the Committee to contribute to the process. One delegation said that the Committee's voice had been absent, and that this silence could be interpreted as acceptance. A number of delegations expressed the regret that there had not been enough time to debate substantive matters and looked forward to the next session of the Committee for a chance to hold more in-depth and constructive discussions. Some delegations drew the attention of the Committee to the progress achieved by the Open-ended Working Group on Informatics, which was mandated by the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1997/1 of 18 July 1997, to design an overall information management strategy for the United Nations system, and suggested that the Committee on Information should keep in view the progress being made in that area.

70. Many delegations felt strongly that more preparation, including work on the agenda, was required for the next session of the Committee, and believed that an organized process of informal consultations would be productive in that regard.

71. One delegation asked to place on record that it joined the consensus on draft resolution B on the understanding that the mandated activities, referred to in paragraph 5 of the draft, would include all those activities of the Department mentioned in previous General Assembly resolutions, including resolution 51/138 B of 13 December 1996.

72. Some delegations asked that the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information convey his views to the Committee. In response, he referred briefly to the Secretary-General's report on questions relating to information,[5] and informed the Committee that he would make a more detailed statement to the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee).

73. Also at its 8th meeting, the Committee decided, by consensus, to recommend to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft resolutions:

Draft resolution A

Information in the service of humanity

The General Assembly,

Taking note of the comprehensive and important report of the Committee on Information,[4]

Also taking note of the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information,[5]

Urges all countries, organizations of the United Nations system as a whole and all others concerned, reaffirming their commitment to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and to the principles of freedom of the press and freedom of information, as well as to those of the independence, pluralism and diversity of the media, deeply concerned by the disparities existing between developed and developing countries and the consequences of every kind arising from those disparities that affect the capability of the public, private or other media and individuals in developing countries to disseminate information and communicate their views and their cultural and ethical values through endogenous cultural production, as well as to ensure the diversity of sources and their free access to information, and recognizing the call in this context for what in the United Nations and at various international forums has been termed "a new world information and communication order, seen as an evolving and continuous process":

(a) To cooperate and interact with a view to reducing existing disparities in information flows at all levels by increasing assistance for the development of communication infrastructures and capabilities in developing countries, with due regard for their needs and the priorities attached to such areas by those countries, and in order to enable them and the public, private or other media in developing countries to develop their own information and communication policies freely and independently and increase the participation of media and individuals in the communication process, and to ensure a free flow of information at all levels;

(b) To ensure for journalists the free and effective performance of their professional tasks and condemn resolutely all attacks against them;

(c) To provide support for the continuation and strengthening of practical training programmes for broadcasters and journalists from public, private and other media in developing countries;

(d) To enhance regional efforts and cooperation among developing countries, as well as cooperation between developed and developing countries, to strengthen communication capacities and to improve the media infrastructure and communication technology in the developing countries, especially in the areas of training and dissemination of information;

(e) To aim, in addition to bilateral cooperation, at providing all possible support and assistance to the developing countries and their media, public, private or other, with due regard to their interests and needs in the field of information and to action already adopted within the United Nations system, including:

(i) The development of the human and technical resources that are indispensable for the improvement of information and communication systems in developing countries and support for the continuation

and strengthening of practical training programmes, such as those already operating under both public and private auspices throughout the developing world;

(ii) The creation of conditions that will enable developing countries and their media, public, private or other, to have, by using their national and regional resources, the communication technology suited to their national needs, as well as the necessary programme material, especially for radio and television broadcasting;

(iii) Assistance in establishing and promoting telecommunication links at the subregional, regional and interregional levels, especially among developing countries;

(iv) The facilitation, as appropriate, of access by the developing countries to advanced communication technology available on the open market;

(f) To provide full support for the International Programme for the Development of Communication[6] of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, which should support both public and private media.

Draft resolution B

United Nations public information policies and activities

The General Assembly,

Strongly reaffirming its primary role in elaborating, coordinating and harmonizing United Nations policies and activities in the field of information,

1. *Takes note* of the report of the Committee on Information;[4]

2. *Notes* that the Committee on Information was unable to finish its task during its nineteenth session;

3. *Takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information;[5]

4. *Also takes note* of the report of the Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities;

5. *Requests* the Secretary-General to continue to implement already mandated activities;

6. *Also requests* the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on Information at its twentieth session, and to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session, on United Nations public information activities, and on the implementation of the measures regarding information and communications approved by the Assembly;

7. *Requests* the Committee on Information to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session;

8. *Decides* to include in the provisional agenda of its fifty-third session the item entitled "Questions relating to information".

74. At the end of the meeting, the Chairman stated that he had taken full note of the deliberations during the meeting.

75. At its 9th meeting, on 17 November, the Committee adopted the first part of its report contained in document A/AC.198/1997/L.1/Rev.1, as orally amended.

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/35/21), annex, sect. V.

[2] Ibid., *Thirty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/36/21); ibid., *Thirty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/37/21 and Corr.1); ibid., *Thirty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/38/21 and Corr.1 and 2); ibid., *Thirty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/39/21); ibid., *Fortieth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/40/21); ibid., *Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/41/21); ibid., *Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/42/21); ibid., *Forty-third Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/43/21); ibid., *Forty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/44/21); ibid., *Forty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/45/21); ibid., *Forty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/46/21); ibid., *Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/47/21); ibid., *Forty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/48/21); ibid., *Forty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/49/21); and ibid., *Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/50/21).

[3] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/51/21).

[4] Ibid., *Fifty-second Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/52/21).

[5] A/52/455.

[6] See United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Records of the General Conference, Twenty-first Session, Belgrade, 23 September to 28 October 1980*, vol. I, *Resolutions*, sect. III.4, resolution 4/21.

Annex I

Statement by the Chairman of the Committee on Information at the opening of the nineteenth session

1. Allow me, in the first place, to thank the Group of Western and Other States for its support, and to the Committee as a whole, on this election. Let me assure you that I will spare no efforts to assist you, and I will be available to you all, both individually and as members of the different groups.

2. Today we begin the first part of the nineteenth session of the Committee on Information, which will be reconvened next September, an arrangement generally welcomed in this time of reform of the Department of Public Information. In fact, recommendations made by the Committee at this stage could have some impact in the reform process, but they could also have a counterproductive effect. We must bear in mind that the Secretary-General appointed a Task Force, under his authority, to make recommendations regarding the reorientation of the public information of the United Nations. The fact that such a Task Force is composed mainly of independent personalities, not directly involved with Secretariat procedures, is an element which brings expectations regarding the tasks of a reformed public information department to be announced by July. At the resumed session of the Committee in September we will be in a somewhat better position to formulate recommendations.

3. In his letter addressed two months ago to the President of the General Assembly, and on several other occasions, the Secretary-General made clear that the reform process aiming at making known the activities of the United Nations with more vigour and purpose and to greater effect should be made in consultation with Member States.

4. This first part of the nineteenth session of the Committee on Information, apart from being the right forum, constitutes a timely opportunity for Member States to express their views on the future Office of Communications and Public Information.

5. In the meantime, as the extended Bureau has already stated that it is available to the Secretary-General and the Task Force on the work regarding United Nations public information, a reform process that we welcome is one more step to making the United Nations ready for the challenges of the twenty-first century.

6. To face such challenges, the existence of a free press able to work without obstacles to the freedom of information and expression is fundamental.

7. On 2 May 1997, World Press Freedom Day was celebrated with a special meeting held in the General Assembly Hall, where several speakers stressed the importance of an independent, pluralistic and free press for the development and strengthening of democracy. As the Secretary-General said, "Press freedom is the key to strong media establishments in developed and developing countries alike."

8. Therefore, almost 50 years after the General Assembly proclaimed the right to information, we should welcome the efforts of reform and reorientation of United Nations public information, a continuously dynamic movement towards better services to the media, non-governmental organizations and other redisseminators, keeping pace with the continuing revolution in communications technology.

9. At this point, I should like to commend the efforts of the Department of Public Information in this particular area. In fact, one year ago, in this same room, a number of representatives emphasized how important it was for the Department to stay abreast of the development of new information sectors such as the Internet, CD-ROMs and other electronics means of communication. A year has passed, and substantial progress has been made on the United Nations home page, which now offers a site on the reform, thus enhancing the transparency of this ongoing process.

10. The possibility of accessing treaties, Security Council resolutions and press releases in the two working languages of the Organization, as well as many other texts; the universal capacity to visit other sites; and the progress made on the French and Spanish home pages are achievements which we cannot but welcome. We can only encourage the Department of Public Information to disseminate information in as many languages as possible. In addition, although it exists in only one language as yet, we welcome the creation of the CyberSchool Bus, which provides students and teachers with an educational site on not only the United Nations, but also its Member States. The figures on electronic communication speak for themselves: by comparison with 489,000 retrievals in January 1996, we recorded 3,700,000 in February 1997.

11. We are now awaiting the implementation of the third phase, the third challenge, of the reform plan: expansion of the use of new information technologies; greater openness

and transparency in the field of information; the on-line connection, starting in June 1997, of all the missions; and easier access for all countries to the United Nations Web sites. Since there are disparities among countries in terms of their capacity to access electronic information, special attention should be paid to the potential role of some essential links in the chain of communication: the United Nations information centres.

12. In fact, and even in places where access to the Internet is fairly simple, there is still considerable demand for printed and audio-visual material about the United Nations. The future role of United Nations information centres must take into consideration the needs and the interests of the audience of the countries in which the centres produce information materials.

13. The report of the Secretary-General on the evaluation of the United Nations information centres (A/AC.198/1997/6) contains nine recommendations, which in due time and with the prevailing consensus in our work will be considered by this Committee.

14. If we think, in particular, of developing countries, we should also stress the importance of another key player in the dissemination of information: the radio. Cost-effective, fast and able to reach even remote areas, the activity of United Nations Radio should be encouraged and adequate resources provided, based on the targets and their public.

15. Another issue raised at the last session of the Committee on Information was the need to conduct an evaluation of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library. As requested, such an evaluation, by independent consultants, has now been completed, and the recommendations made by the Secretary-General in that regard will also be considered by the Committee.

16. Time is on our side. The ingredients for a good recipe regarding United Nations public information are at hand. The secret, of course, is how to mix them together in order to better serve the international community. We, the Committee on Information, can add the proper salt for that purpose. And if we stir in the amount of consensus that we mastered in the past, it will have a much better taste for the future.

17. Let me conclude by expressing appreciation for the work of the extended Bureau, the key element in the relations between Member States and the Department of Public Information, and a unique example of continuous coordination between Member States and the Secretariat. I am sure that you all share my view that the role of the extended Bureau should be institutionally recognized in the framework of the reform of the Department of Public Information.

Annex II

Statement by the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information at the opening of the nineteenth session

1. It is indeed a privilege and a pleasure for me to welcome Member States to the nineteenth session of the Committee on Information.

2. First of all, Mr. Chairman, I should like to congratulate you on your election. Your experience in the Committee as a member of the Bureau for a number of years assures me that I can expect a strengthening of the close and continuous working relationship which the Department of Public Information has the pleasure of maintaining with the extended Bureau, and thus with the Committee. Allow me to extend my warm congratulations also to your colleagues on the Bureau for their election to their important posts.

3. I should also like to take this opportunity to express my warm appreciation and sincere admiration for the exemplary manner in which our outgoing Chairman, Mr. Ivan Maximov, presided over the work of the Committee for the past two eventful years.

4. There has been close collaboration between the Department and the Committee, through regular meetings with its extended Bureau. Moreover, the consensus achieved within this Committee over the past few years has encouraged and inspired all of us. We will creatively build on this accomplishment with the confidence that consensus does not preclude progress, but is one of its strongest prerequisites.

5. I therefore attach the greatest significance to the current session of the Committee in view of the special importance that the Secretary-General has attached to the role of public information in promoting the objectives of the Organization. Let me assure the Committee that we in the Department of Public Information warmly welcome this emphasis on the key role of public information in the future of the United Nations.

6. In this regard, I am very glad that the Committee will have an opportunity today to listen to Mr. Maurice F. Strong, the Secretary-General's Coordinator for United Nations Reform, and Mr. Mark Malloch-Brown, the Chairman of the Task Force.

7. I wish to take a moment to recall the recent observance of World Press Freedom Day on 2 May in the General Assembly Hall. The affirmation of press freedom by the General Assembly dates back to the very beginning of our Organization, in a resolution adopted over 50 years ago. The Assembly also proclaimed the right to information in article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

8. Today, in this age of information technology, the issue of press freedom has more relevance than ever before. The opportunities presented by these rapid changes in technology are boundless. News is crossing national borders. Concepts are overcoming natural boundaries. Access to information has become an established right for societies. Freedom of expression is now fully recognized as an inalienable right for individuals.

9. As the Secretary-General stated during the observance of World Press Freedom Day, "We reaffirm that no democratic society can exist without a free, independent and pluralistic press ... We honour the courage and sacrifice of the men and women for whom the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media, regardless of frontiers, is more than a profession. It is a calling, a mission, a sacred imperative ... Press freedom is the key to strong media establishments in developed and developing countries alike ... Assaults on freedom of the press undermine the goals of the United Nations Charter, including the development and maintenance of democracy." The Secretary-General also paid tribute to those whose sacrifices and persistent efforts made a free press an international commitment.

10. We in the Department of Public Information will maintain our steadfast commitment to encouraging a free and varied press in every region of the world and through every medium, not only by organizing meetings and seminars, but through practical assistance to the media as it carries out its important work, and by promoting an open working environment for the media at the United Nations.

11. Since its first session in 1946, at which it created the Department of Public Information, the General Assembly has highlighted the crucial role of public information in fostering an informed public understanding of the aims and activities of the United Nations. Over the years, the Department has accumulated more than 350 mandated activities, not including those to observe annually 21 international days and weeks, 13 decades and 5 international years, and to hold a series of international conferences. As a result, the Department has concentrated on specific priority areas, while ensuring a flexible approach in handling its mandates. We have focused our efforts on the development

of communications policies, programmes and strategies, and the provision of information services to all parts of the Organization, at Headquarters and in the field.

12. Having to do much more with less, the Department of Public Information has made every effort to maintain its professional credibility, sharpen the focus on specific issues, forge stronger links with media organizations, develop wider audiences and streamline its operational machinery. Partnerships have been established or strengthened within and outside the United Nations system. Joint ventures, often utilizing extrabudgetary funds, have been organized with influential media organizations, leaders of civil society, intellectual and educational groups, the business community, appropriate private enterprises and relevant governmental institutions. At the same time, we have also developed closer working relations with other United Nations departments and programmes. An example of this cooperation was the preparation of publicity and media strategies for the build-up to the recent cycle of world conferences on economic, social and human rights. Currently, the Department is working closely with the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development to develop an effective publicity campaign for next month's special session of the General Assembly for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21.

13. Another example of cooperation with other departments is the close working relations which have been developed with the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations, Humanitarian Affairs and Political Affairs, on the initiative of the Department of Public Information, to ensure the deployment and continuous support of information components in all field operations. The Department is now providing the essential element at Headquarters for the backstopping of the information elements of peacekeeping and other operations deployed by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

14. The Department of Public Information strives to work through the mechanism of the Joint United Nations Information Committee to bring together our partners in the United Nations system to help coordinate the message or messages that the information arms of the programmes and the agencies wish to communicate regarding their particular role in the issues before the General Assembly. One lesson is clear from these exercises – a multiplicity of information units will invariably lead to a multiplicity of messages.

15. We are living in an era of communications. Communications programmes are as crucial to United Nations public information as are media services – they provide them with substance, bring them to life and make it possible to attract a wider network of potential supporters. At a time when television has been described as the sixteenth member of the Security Council, there is however still a tendency in some quarters in the Organization to view public information as merely a subsidiary "support service". A major challenge facing us, therefore, is to build a public information culture within the United Nations.

16. One of the frustrating, yet inevitable, elements of the media profession is the accumulation of expert observers, many of whom seem to have instantly acquired their knowledge and wisdom in that increasingly complex profession. Information work appears to be deceptively easy. An avid reader may be tempted to postulate that writing could be done with the same ease as reading. Those who grant the occasional interview might believe they possess the skills needed to anchor a television news programme. Yet the truth is that public information is a demanding profession requiring training, experience and a full-time commitment. We must always deliver regularly, effectively and on time. Being visible means being vulnerable. Success may pass unnoticed, yet any error glares in public. This is why I compare public information to a heartbeat. Information is so vital to a participatory democracy. Yet, like a heartbeat, it is often taken for granted.

17. Some progress has been achieved in building a public information culture within the United Nations, but much more needs to be done. In this, the role of the Secretary-General is central. He personifies the Organization, giving it a human face to which the media normally respond. Heads of departments and other senior officials are valuable partners in a public information strategy for the United Nations if the Organization is to communicate a coherent message, one which conveys the relevance of the United Nations to our daily lives. Thematic messages should be prepared in cooperation with the departments directly concerned with specific issues, particularly in preparation for special events or meetings. While the Department has made significant strides in strengthening its communications programmes and media services, the impact of these efforts depends to a large extent on the existence of a clear, coherent message, and this remains one of our most important challenges. While the Department is accountable for programme delivery, the public perception of the United Nations is everyone's concern. Enhanced cooperation between the Department and senior officials throughout the United Nations system will consolidate a coherent message and a positive image of the Organization.

18. Modern technology is bound to play a crucial role for the United Nations as it prepares to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. Rapid advances in communications and information technology are changing the way we

package, transmit and consume information today. The Department of Public Information has grasped the opportunities offered by this new fourth medium – information technology – in its priority work areas. Joining the ranks of the traditional three media – press, radio and television – this new medium has three attractive essentials for us, namely, speed, cost savings and a direct outreach to wider audiences, such as youth and policy makers.

19. Vital information on United Nations activities, global statistics, texts of international treaties, resolutions and other press communiqués, which used to take hours, even days, to disseminate, are now immediately available on the United Nations home page on the World Wide Web. Recent statistics on access indicate approximately 800,000 "hits" per week to obtain United Nations information. We must obviously harness this new technology in creating an atmosphere of peace. Although still in the early stages of development, information technology is fast becoming an indispensable tool for communication among all countries and all peoples.

20. The use of information technology is revolutionizing the communications strategy of the United Nations as well as its internal management, and it is helping to build an inextricable bond between the United Nations and its partners, including Governments, media and civil society.

21. However, information technology is not yet universally available, as developments have so far been confined largely to specific areas. The challenge for the international community is to enable a free flow of current information so that as many countries as possible may benefit from this new technology.

22. In the meantime, however, we should not overlook the traditional media. While utilizing information technology to our fullest capacity for outreach activities, the Department has continued to make gains in outreach through traditional media as well, being mindful of their crucial importance in all countries, including those already travelling on the information superhighway.

23. As promised, the Department's radio capacity has been dramatically strengthened. Last month, the Secretary-General took part in a first ever, live international broadcast organized by United Nations Radio. During the one-hour programme originating from Headquarters, the Secretary-General fielded questions from foreign affairs correspondents and editors speaking from radio studios in Australia, Germany, India, Japan, Kenya, the Netherlands, South Africa and the United States of America.

24. Regular United Nations Radio information is today available in English, French and Spanish, 24 hours a day, by dialing the telephone number (212) 963-3777. Special radio links have been established through a network of more than 1,800 radio stations worldwide. A project is under way to introduce United Nations Radio on the Internet, both in a daily live broadcast and as archival files. United Nations Radio has also strengthened its cooperation within the United Nations system, particularly with agencies dealing with humanitarian situations, for example, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the World Food Programme. Through arrangements with television networks, the Department's video product "Year in Review" reached 360 million households, via satellite broadcasts in six languages. The audience of "UN in Action", a three-minute weekly, is estimated at 160 million viewers, through CNN and other broadcasters, in 106 countries. The United Nations television series "World Chronicle" is now broadcast weekly on the International Channel at 7:30 a.m. every Sunday, New York time. This unedited 30-minute programme, produced by the Department, began in 1980 and can now be seen in 7 countries on 16 television stations. Guests have included such personalities as Secretaries-General and President Nelson Mandela.

25. The publications of the Department of Public Information are designed to create an informed awareness of the Organization's activities. This is done through institutional publications which are offered as reference works and authoritative handbooks, and through more explanatory and persuasive publications which represent a more direct attempt to give an idea of the Organization's wide-ranging involvement in the central issues of our time – and of its many achievements. While continuing to produce materials in printed form, the Department also places them on the United Nations home page when this seems appropriate, as a means of increasing their impact and boosting sales. The Department is in the process of revitalizing its publications through a more user-friendly approach in terms of both style and content and through closer collaboration with the substantive departments. Considerable efforts have been made to make our publications more marketable and to offer more of them for sale. The result is that sales revenues more than doubled between 1994 and 1996. In the past three years, design and editorial services have been revamped and modernized through the introduction of technology for computer-assisted editing and layout. Today, project turnaround time has been reduced by two thirds, so that small publications can be ready for printing literally overnight. New partnerships with publishing houses have expanded the impact of our publications beyond academic circles.

26. The Department is continuing to strengthen its partnership with the international community of non-governmental organizations. The goal is clear: to ensure that information on the work of the United Nations reaches people at the local level in the civil societies of all countries. Commemorating 50 years of cooperation, the fiftieth annual Department of Public Information/non-governmental organization conference, to be held in September of this year, will focus on the theme of building partnerships. Last month, the Department offered associate status to an additional 50 non-governmental organizations from different parts of the world, bringing the total number of non-governmental organizations associated with the Department to more than 1,500.

27. Our weekly briefings for non-governmental organizations provide an opportunity for direct dialogue on most of the issues currently dealt with by the Organization. They are based on the participation of not only officials of the Secretariat and the United Nations system but also permanent representatives who chair committees or work on specific projects, as well as representatives of non-governmental organizations working on specific issues, in order to create a multidimensional vision of the work of the United Nations.

28. To facilitate access to United Nations information and documentation, last year the Department of Public Information reinstated the NGO Resource Centre at Headquarters, which offers free access to the optical disk system containing United Nations documents in all of the official languages and to the system of United Nations home pages on the Internet.

29. The public's interest, as evinced by the requests received from all sectors of civil society around the world, shows that United Nations activities are becoming increasingly integrated into the life of nations. The Department's initiatives mobilize public participation, through non-governmental organizations, in the search for global solutions to problems that transcend national borders, such as poverty, social disintegration, environmental degradation, new infectious diseases, drugs, terrorism and the threat of nuclear proliferation. By enlisting the aid of non-governmental organizations in spreading the message of the United Nations, the Department is responding to the General Assembly's 1946 assertion that "the United Nations cannot achieve the purposes for which it has been created unless the peoples of the world are fully informed of its aims and activities".

30. We have introduced into our guided tours operation at Headquarters effective measures that include the computerization of our reservation system and a personnel structure based on a small core group of full-time guides, with the majority of needs being met by part-time guides recruited under special service agreements. The latter measure enables the Department to save on common staff costs. In addition, by using a rotation system, we avoid any overtime costs for guided tours conducted in the evening or on weekends or holidays.

31. The constraints imposed by security considerations have seriously hampered our efforts to create an effective and competitive guided tour operation. Since 1993, maximum group size has been limited to 15 people instead of 25, and the presence of these small groups means that more guides are needed to handle the same number of visitors, thereby increasing staff costs. At the same time, total revenue from guided tours is declining because small group size also limits the flow of visitors and, therefore, our reservation capacity during peak periods. The result is an unfortunate contradiction: while we are doing our utmost to attract more visitors, we often find ourselves forced to turn them away because of our inability to accommodate them.

32. Misperceptions and misrepresentation of the activities and purposes of the United Nations have become, in recent years, a worrying aspect of some sections of the media. The traditional response to such false reporting was to ignore them. However, in today's conditions, where instantaneous reporting has such a profound influence on public opinion, and sustained and focused false reports can distort reality beyond recognition, there is need for a prompt response to set the record straight. As a modest effort in this context, I have developed a media response capacity in the Department of Public Information. The result of this initiative has been the production, over the past year, of a series of fact sheets in simple media-friendly format, dealing with most of the misstatements that have been made from time to time about the United Nations in the print and other media. The effectiveness of this initiative is indicated by the great demand for the fact sheets by individuals as well as institutions, including media organizations. More significantly, many media reports have quoted extensively from them to strengthen arguments supportive of the Organization. Of course, all the fact sheets are posted on the Web and are read widely by individuals able to use the system.

33. Modern technology represents a continuous challenge, and when we master it, its effect is also electrifying. To keep up with the new trends, I wish to bring to your notice an important initiative that we undertook in the past year. I take particular pride in the World Television Forum held at Headquarters in November 1996, which was co-sponsored by the Department, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy

and Radio-Televisione Italiana. Nearly 150 broadcasting professionals from around the world attended to examine the role of television in covering United Nations-related issues and informing the public around the world.

34. By their presence in a particular country and their closeness to the local community, our information centres are uniquely equipped to promote an informed understanding of the United Nations. They have the capability to present United Nations themes and issues in a way that is meaningful to local audiences. Information centres translate the United Nations message not only literally – which they do in some 60 languages – but also figuratively, by connecting a global issue to local interest and promoting awareness of the significance of the Organization as a whole. By being tuned into the local debate they are also positioned to respond swiftly to misperceptions and inaccuracies about the United Nations, as well as to unwarranted criticism of the Organization which may appear in the media.

35. Over the past three and a half years, the Department has achieved the integration of approximately 30 United Nations information centres with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). This represents close to half of the global network of United Nations information centres, which, along with nine United Nations offices in the Commonwealth of Independent States and six United Nations information services, spread the message of the United Nations.

36. The integration process has involved painstaking negotiations with all parties concerned, on a case-by-case basis, with the endorsement of the Committee and the General Assembly. In the process, the Department has taken into full account the prerequisites for successful integration – the views of the host Government, the functional autonomy and the professional effectiveness of the information centres and the imperative that integration should realize savings in the cost of common premises and services.

37. Internally, three elements constitute the backbone of the integration process. They are rigorous selection and training of national information officers, thorough professional briefings of those United Nations resident representatives who also serve as centre directors and regular feedback to the Department to ensure that public information mandates of the Organization are effectively fulfilled.

38. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library continues to stress technological innovation and the provision of information electronically among its priorities. It is implementing a new client-server system – the Integrated Library Management System – that brings together all major library operations, incorporating existing functions already automated with other functions heretofore performed manually. The system will reduce duplication of work, increase staff productivity and improve control over administrative and financial processes, as well as enhance user satisfaction through a user-friendly retrieval system.

39. To maximize the speed and efficiency with which a broad range of time- and mission-critical information is delivered throughout the Secretariat and to permanent missions, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library has initiated a customized desktop delivery service for a steadily expanding patron base. Included in this service are twice-daily updates on news coverage of the United Nations, customized reports from an international news alert service, and an increasing number of electronic newspapers and journals from around the world. In many instances, this service has eliminated the need for, or reduced the number of, print copies to which the Dag Hammarskjöld Library subscribes.

40. The Committee has before it seven reports that have been prepared in response to specific requests made by it. I shall draw your attention here to three of them, namely, the report on the evaluation of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library and the addendum containing comments of the Secretary-General (A/AC.198/1997/2 and Add.1); the review of publications produced by the Department in the sphere of development (A/AC.198/1997/4); and the report on the integration of United Nations information centres with field offices of UNDP (A/AC.198/1997/5).

41. The evaluation of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library was carried out, as requested by the Committee, with the assistance of two independent consultants, one from Canada and the other from Jamaica. The report contains 28 recommendations. I am glad to say that many of the recommendations concerning the use of cost-effective technological innovations endorse initiatives already under way in the Library. The Committee may note that a number of the recommendations would have financial implications. Should the Committee decide to take action on them, we would make every effort to implement them through redeployment of existing resources or through extrabudgetary funding.

42. The report on publications in the sphere of development provides a comprehensive picture of the principal recurrent and non-recurrent publications of the Department, some of which have come to acquire a prominent place among readers of development publications. An award-winning example of that is *Africa Recovery*. At the same time, *Development Business*, produced in cooperation with the regional development banks, is a self-financing publication aimed at a different audience which

includes the business world. It enables developing countries to procure goods and services at internationally competitive prices, and assists private sector firms in developed countries by providing information and opportunities for them to compete for international contracts.

43. The third report I wish to highlight is the one concerning the integration of United Nations information centres with UNDP field offices. The report is an evaluation of our experience with integration based on a survey carried out for this purpose. The survey found that local constituents relied on United Nations information centres as their most important source of information about the United Nations, and that information was still disseminated primarily by traditional means, since new information technologies were not widely accessible. Another notable finding of the survey was the confirmation of the role of the centres as a basic focal point for the United Nations system.

44. As you are aware, the Secretary-General has expressed his determination to bring about reform within the Secretariat. I wish to reiterate my Department's full support for implementing the priorities contained in the Secretary-General's proposals for strengthening the United Nations system. My colleagues in the Department and I have welcomed the Secretary-General's objectives from the very beginning of his leadership.

45. Cost-effective management is essential to reform; it is also an ongoing process. In fact, the Department initiated a reform process well before the financial crisis made downsizing an imperative. Reform-oriented, cost-effective measures and budgetary savings were initiated three years ago with the introduction of the Department's first negative growth budget. Additionally, over $8 million had to be cut abruptly in early 1996. All cuts and reform measures were implemented with the full participation of the staff and consensus support from Member States.

46. Reform, like public information, is a living, dynamic movement which, like a heart, never stops for a second. And as we struggle daily to enhance the image of the United Nations in a swiftly changing world, we know that public information is not just a department, it is a professional commitment. With this commitment, my colleagues and I will continue to put our best efforts into creating innovative outreach projects, particularly those designed for the media and the public. We count on the Committee's continued support as the Department endeavours to spread the United Nations message to as wide an audience as possible in the most cost-effective way.

Annex III

Note to the Committee on Information dated 2 September 1997

1. At the opening meeting of its nineteenth session, the Committee on Information decided to hold its nineteenth session in two segments. Accordingly, during the first segment (13-19 May 1997), the Committee considered organizational matters and held the general debate under agenda item 6. The Committee also decided to continue its general debate during the second segment of the session (3-8 September 1997), when it would also take up agenda item 7 (Preparation and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its fifty-second session), taking into account the recommendations contained in the report of the Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities (A/AC.198/1997/CRP.1, annex) and the proposals of the Secretary-General.

2. It may be recalled that in his letter dated 17 March 1997 addressed to the President of the General Assembly (A/51/829), the Secretary-General had identified as a principal challenge the need for a strengthened communications and information operation that would help increase global support for the Organization. In pursuit of that goal, the Secretary-General convened the Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities, composed of communications experts from both within and outside the United Nations system.

3. The report of the Task Force, entitled "Global vision, local voice: a strategic communications programme for the United Nations", has been issued. As indicated in his proposals for the reform of the United Nations (A/51/950), announced on 16 July 1997, the Secretary-General concurs with the report's principal recommendations, which include:

(a) Placing the communications function at the heart of the strategic management of the Organization and consolidating all communications activities under a strong senior official who would be part of his immediate team, in order to turn the United Nations into an effective modern communications-oriented organization;

(b) Strengthening the Organization's capacity to communicate at the country level so that the global messages, activities and information of the United Nations both reflect and are tailored to meaningful local contexts. This will entail establishing imaginative local partnerships, in close cooperation with Governments;

(c) Completing the process of integrating United Nations information centres into the offices of United Nations resident coordinators, but with a much stronger system of feedback and accountability. To ensure effective delivery of communications and information programmes, the resident coordinators should work closely with and report to the senior official in charge of United Nations communications activities;

(d) Creating a culture of communications throughout the Organization, with responsibility for public diplomacy being borne by all senior officials, ambassadors and the larger United Nations family;

(e) Recognizing the role of the General Assembly in providing strategic guidance and direction for the communications and information function, while giving the Secretariat much greater responsibility for determining the methods with which mandated goals will be met.

4. As already indicated, the Secretary-General is in concurrence with the conceptual approach and thrust of the recommendations of the Task Force. Additionally, he has received recommendations in this regard from the Executive Coordinator for Reform and the Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management. He has also taken into account the views of the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information. The Secretary-General is therefore proposing that the post for the communications and information function be at the Under-Secretary-General level. This reflects the importance that the Secretary-General attaches to the role of communications, not as a support function but as an integral part of the substantive programme of the United Nations. The new entity will be called the Office of Communications and Public Information. This dual change, and the leadership role that the Secretary-General envisages for communications and information, will ensure that a communications dimension is effectively integrated into the work of all the Organization's departments. Meeting the communications needs of these departments will be a central priority for the new Office.

5. In view of the Secretary-General's regular, direct and continuous contact with the Office of the Spokesman for the Secretary-General, the Office of the Assistant Secretary-General for External Relations and the speechwriters' unit, the Secretary-General's position is that these units should remain part of his Office. However, given the imperative of establishing a consolidated communications operation, the Under-Secretary-General will establish both strategic and close day-to-day working relations with these units to ensure that they operate as part of a fully integrated

communications function through effective, substantive coordination.

6. With regard to United Nations information centres and services, a comprehensive review of this field network will incorporate the complex, ongoing process of integrating information centres in developing countries, as already approved by consensus by the General Assembly. Further integration will be completed along the lines indicated by the Assembly, that is, on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the views of the host country, and on the understanding that the information function and the autonomy of the centres would not be adversely affected. As the Secretary-General has repeatedly indicated, integration entails a unified approach in the field, with one premise and one flag. In integrated centres, resident coordinators would be responsible to the head of the Office of Communications and Public Information for developing and executing communications plans. In industrialized countries, where United Nations information centres are the main United Nations presence, a case-by-case review would envisage enhanced partnerships with members of the United Nations system and with United Nations-oriented groups such as United Nations associations, depending on their capacity. The use of national personnel for programme delivery would be stressed, and cost-effective and professional criteria would be applied in all these field offices. Moreover, information centres should be provided with sufficient resources, particularly those in countries where local media are less developed.

7. The recommendations of the Secretary-General will be reflected in the revised budget estimates to be submitted to the appropriate intergovernmental bodies during the forthcoming session of the General Assembly.

8. The Secretary-General will ensure that the approved proposals will be implemented in a professional manner, maintaining cost-effective programme delivery.

9. The Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information will keep the Secretary-General informed, as usual, of the deliberations of the Committee on Information.

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